

# The bloom after the storm - Chapter 12 Chapter 11

Čöldhëärt4-5 minutes

---

The next week passed. Not differently because of school. Or the project. Or because Aurora's parents were watching her like a hawk. Every time she'd take out her phone, every time she stepped out the door, every time she grinned at a text on her phone. The questions had begun. Aurora wasn't sure why she cared. One night she was assisting Ethan with homework when her mother knocked on the doorframe. "Aurora." "What?" "Come down." Her mother's voice had tightened Aurora's stomach. The atmosphere in the living room was different. Her father was sitting on the right of the sofa. Her mother opposite. Both of them were frowning. Aurora felt like a defendant at trial. "Sit," her father said. Aurora sat. Nobody said anything for a few seconds. Then her mother spoke. "We heard you'd been talking a lot to a boy." Aurora was confused. Ah, so this was what this was about. "His name is Noah." Her mother glared. Aurora noted the glare and felt hurt. "Are you dating him?" her father asked. "No." It was the truth. They weren't dating. They barely knew each other. "We did a school project together." Her parents shot her another look. Aurora hated that look. It meant they were talking and they didn't want her to hear. Her mother sighed. "Just focus on your schoolwork." "I am." "Well, focus more." Aurora frowned. "I still get good grades." "I know, but it's not about grades." "What then?" She blurted the question before she'd thought it over. The air became thicker. Nobody answered for a moment. Then her mother finally said, "You're changing." Aurora stared at her. "What do you mean?" "You're getting harder." That hit harder than she expected. Harder. When had she become harder? She wanted to say something back. Defend herself. Instead she stood. "I'm going to my room." "Aurora," her mother said. "I'm tired." And she walked up the stairs without waiting for permission. Once upstairs she locked the door and lay down, eyes staring into nothing. No tears. She knew the discussion wasn't really about Noah. It never really was. The distance from her parents had started before she knew Noah. She heard a little tap on her door. She smiled slightly. "Ethan." She smiled a little, her brother came with a packet of biscuits. Aurora burst out laughing. "What's this?" "A peace offering." "From who?" "From me." She laughed even harder. He took the packet and sat beside her. "They were fighting before you came home." Aurora smiled faded. "What about?" He paused. "I'm not sure." He was lying but she didn't want him to get in trouble. She knew how much he cared about them both, and how much he cared about his little sister. The next day Aurora went to school looking really tired. Noah noticed it immediately. "You're not sleeping." Aurora raised an eyebrow. "Are you a detective or something?" "No." "Then how do you know?" He smiled. "I can tell by the look on your face." Aurora sighed. "That's

terrible timing," Noah smirked. For the first time, Aurora told him the truth. Not all of it, just enough. "I fought with my parents." Noah closed his book. "Why?" Aurora paused then giggled. "I don't even know," Noah said nothing. Not because he didn't care. He cared. But Aurora realized now that listening was different from hearing. So many people heard. So very few listened. Noah listened. When Aurora finished, Noah leaned on the arm of his chair. "Do you know what I think?" Aurora didn't answer. "I think you're putting too much effort into making everyone else happy." She was stunned. Because he might be right. Maybe for the longest time she'd just focused on trying to please others and now she'd forgotten who she was. As Aurora walked home from school Noah's words echoed in her head. For so long she'd been trying to be the person others wanted her to be, whether that was her parents or the teachers or her friends or everybody else. But now she'd finally start trying to be the person she really wanted to be. And hopefully that person she'd always imagined being. Or hopefully that person just might be becoming real.